



The Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

presents a seminar

by

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on

What is Shared in Shared Bikes?: Mobility, Space, and Capital

Friday, 11 October 2019

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Room 114 Humanities Building

New Asia College, CUHK

A light lunch will be served at 12:30 pm. First come first served.

In the middle of the 2010s, colorful bikes suddenly occupied the streets and many open spaces in big cities throughout China. Unlock a bike with one's mobile phone, ride it wherever one wants, and drop the bike off anywhere when finished: bike sharing has become the new trend. The rise of these dockless bike-sharing schemes is intriguing, especially because China has been eager in the past two decades to shed its image of a bicycle kingdom and enthusiastically embrace private car ownership.

While these schemes have been praised by development agencies for their potential for environmental protection and sustainable growth, my fieldwork shows that urban residents are rarely committed to these causes in their daily use of the shared-bikes; instead, they see "convenience" (*fangbian*) as the main attraction these schemes offer. This talk takes "convenience" as an entry to unpack this new form of mobility as part of the gig economy in the process of rapid urbanization. On the one hand, despite the convergence of experience expressed in "convenience," this new form of mobility is embedded in different kinds of socio-economic realities and spatial imaginations of connectedness for different social groups. On the other hand, such convenience is built upon an ambiguous perception of public space across boundaries of different social groups in an ever-expanding urban environment. Financialization of such conveniences in the bike-sharing schemes, which is enabled by an imagination of a technological fix of a spatial-social issue, seems to reproduce rather than disrupt existing social hierarchy.

Dr. Jun Zhang is an assistant professor in the Department of Asian and International Studies at the City University of Hong Kong. She is interested in social transformation in the process of rapid urbanization both from contemporary and historical perspectives. She is the author of *Driving towards Modernity: The Car and the Lives of the Middle Class in Contemporary China* (Cornell University Press, 2019).

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME